# Curriculum for Excellence

#### S1–S6 Progression: ‘A coherent learning experience’ — progression from S1–S3 into the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence: advice to senior managers in secondary schools

## 1 Introduction

This paper is intended for senior managers in secondary schools, although it will also be of interest to managers in Scotland’s colleges and colleagues across partner organisations.

It sets out the ways in which the learning experience can be made coherent for learners as they progress through S1–S3 and into qualifications in the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence. The focus of this paper is qualifications as a key element of a senior phase — alongside the ‘continued emphasis on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and the development of a wide range of skills for life and skills for work’ (*Building the Curriculum 3*).

This paper should be read in conjunction with the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board Discussion Paper *Curriculum for Excellence — The Senior Phase* published on the Curriculum for Excellence website. It complements both *Building the Curriculum 3* and ongoing work on providing early insights into planning the senior phase through *Building your Curriculum* — both of which are also available on the Curriculum for Excellence website.

As outlined in the senior phase discussion paper, the senior phase offers all young people the whole range of Curriculum for Excellence entitlements:

* a curriculum which is **coherent**
* the opportunity to obtain qualifications as well as to continue to develop the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities
* opportunities to continue to develop **skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work** with a continuous focus on **literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing**
* **personal support** to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities that Curriculum for Excellence can provide; and
* support in moving into **positive and sustained destinations** beyond school

## 2 Background

*Building the Curriculum 3* and the June 2009 ministerial announcement on the next generation of National Qualifications both raise questions about the ways in which learners will progress through S1 to S3 and into qualifications in the senior phase of the curriculum. This discussion paper acknowledges and builds upon the significant strengths of the current system and extensive existing good practice and seeks to:

* outline how progression might happen from S1–S6, including development of breadth, depth and application of skills
* describe some of the ways in which qualifications offered in S4–S6 and beyond can build on the broad general education in S1–S3, and how the development of new and revised qualifications will seek to facilitate this

Because of their importance to Scotland’s social and economic development, the science and language areas are used here to exemplify how a coherent progression framework can be provided from S1–S6, but this advice is equally applicable to other curriculum areas. It concentrates particularly on progression from curriculum experiences and outcomes to qualifications in the senior phase, while acknowledging that these will not be the only important aspects of progression and must be considered within a wider context of progression in learning across all the entitlements of the senior phase.

## 3 Learner progression S1–S3

Learners will experience a broad general education from S1–S3. They will progress through the experiences and outcomes of the eight curriculum areas at differing rates. As they progress, they will become increasingly secure in their understanding and application of concepts, thus developing their skills and attributes. As the *Assessment for Curriculum for Excellence Strategic Vision Key Principles* paper explains:

‘Reflecting the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, progress is now defined in terms of “how much” and “how well” as well as learners’ rate of progress. This approach will promote greater breadth and depth of learning including a greater focus on the secure development of skills and knowledge.’

As learners progress in S1-S3, they will be making and confirming links across all aspects of their learning including experiences and outcomes within and across curriculum areas and subjects, as well as personal achievements. As *Building the Curriculum 3* explains:

‘The period from S1 to S3 has a clear purpose: that all young people will have a strong platform for later learning and for successful transition to qualifications at the right level for them.’

Third level curriculum experiences and outcomes need to be interpreted as a minimum entitlement for all young people. It is our ambition that **all** young people will be secure in their learning through to third level outcomes in all curricular areas by the end of S3 and some young people up to fourth level in some curricular areas. Schools will want to offer learners opportunities for personalisation and choice, while ensuring that they have the opportunity to cover experiences and outcomes in all eight curriculum areas, using a variety of approaches, including interdisciplinary learning.

It is important to acknowledge that young people will progress at different rates and in different ways, and the end of S3 will find most learners ready to progress to different levels of qualification in different subjects. As *Building the Curriculum* 3 indicates, during S1 to S3:

‘Young people will progress at different rates and need different levels of support and some will continue to experience learning at curriculum levels below the third level, as appropriate to their needs and achievements. Schools and their partners should plan to make choices available to all, whether or not they have achieved the outcomes at the third level, and offer motivating opportunities for personalisation and choice for young people who need additional support for their learning.’

During S1–S3, learners will experience a variety of content and contexts in each curricular area, as defined by the experiences and outcomes. They will be given opportunities to experience breadth and depth of learning and to apply skills in new and unfamiliar contexts.

At some point learners will begin to consider whether, and to what extent, they will carry forward their interest in particular subjects into qualifications — and at what levels. This will be informed by the areas of the curriculum they enjoy, their ambitions for future study and employment, and by where they are in their learning. Careers-related learning will help them to reflect upon these issues, and they will continue to learn about the world of work in day-to-day teaching. Sometimes they will have an opportunity to include a Skills for Work qualification — for example, in Creative Digital Media, Retailing or Health and Social Care — within their programme of study, often in partnership with a further education college or local employer.

At the end of S3, as described in *Building the Curriculum 3* and other Curriculum for Excellence papers, the learner’s progress and achievements will be recognised through an S3 profile.

## 4 Transition from S3 to the senior phase

The end of S3 marks the transition from a broad general education into the senior phase. It is assumed that at this point, all learners will be secure in their understanding of third level curriculum outcomes. Some learners will have progressed to fourth level in some or all curriculum areas and many will be preparing to submit a portfolio of evidence for assessment of Literacy and/or Numeracy qualifications and may have completed some Units within a Skills for Work qualification. As they move into S4, most learners will be ready to begin work in the qualifications framework at SCQF level 4 or 5 — National 4 and National 5. Some will have experienced programmes of learning where they are grouped by curriculum level, which prepare them to start work on qualifications at SCQF level 6 — Higher.

Coherence in curriculum content/contexts, design, delivery and assessment across transition points will be the key to successful progression. Continuity and coherence within and across subjects and between curriculum outcomes and qualifications and their assessment will be of particular importance here. To ensure that the senior phase builds appropriately on earlier learning, qualifications at SCQF levels 2–7 will be reviewed and revised to ensure that they provide good progression from achievements in experiences and outcomes. Learning does not stop and start at convenient points; rather it is differentiated by individual experience. This means that qualifications build on earlier learning. As *Building the Curriculum 3* explains:

‘This should ensure a smooth progression through the learning experience from curriculum areas into qualifications.’

and

‘Qualifications should both reflect the learning that has taken place and develop pathways to the next stage of learning and life.’

All of this reminds us that qualifications in the senior phase are part of the 3 to 18 continuum. The Curriculum for Excellence Senior Phase paper makes clear that:

‘The Senior Phase of young peoples’ education builds firmly on the broad general education which went before. It is the way in which the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence will flow through from earlier phases of education and continue to be delivered for young people at a particular point in their educational journey.

The Senior Phase must offer young people the opportunity to extend and deepen their education as they start, or in some cases continue, to build a portfolio of qualifications which recognises their learning, enables them to continue to develop skills and offers pathways to the next stage — whether that is further or higher education, training or employment.’

The review and revision of National Qualifications will ensure that qualifications support the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence, aid development of the four capacities, and provide good progression from curriculum experiences and outcomes. This can be exemplified by describing how the review and revision might work in one area of science and one of languages — Biology and French are taken as the examples, though in the latter case, this would apply to all languages.

In Biology, qualifications will be designed to provide learners with opportunities to investigate their environment by observing, experimenting and recording, and by making sense of the evidence they collect and present. In expressing views on the impact Biology makes on their own lives and that of others, and by developing scientific values of respect for living things and honesty in collecting and presenting data, learners will be encouraged to become effective contributors and responsible citizens through their study of Biology. In French, qualifications will promote the development of the productive skills of listening and talking through the sharing of assessment criteria with learners in formative assessment work, prior to their involvement in summative assessment for certification purposes. The class teacher will thus have the opportunity to clearly relate the classroom learning to the assessment outcomes. This will support both flexible and contextualised assessment within the languages area. Furthermore, the study of any language leads to a better understanding of the world and other people; it develops linguistic and cultural capital. Equipped with this skill set, Scottish linguists should be able to take their place in a multilingual society with confidence.

The contexts in Biology qualifications can provide the opportunities to use and develop a wide range of skills for learning, life and work. Biology qualifications will be designed to develop and assess critical thinking and problem solving skills through investigative and practical work. They will develop numeracy skills through using numerical and graphical information to present and analyse data.

In French qualifications, different contexts can provide rich opportunities for individual learner needs to be addressed; this can be effected through integration of themes and topics in the classroom to develop and assess individual skills and competences in the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Like the experiences and outcomes, qualifications in science and languages will act as a motivation for progressively developing breadth, depth and application of skills, knowledge and understanding, and so maximise achievement.

Biology and French qualifications will be designed to build upon earlier knowledge and achievement and allow choice within and between specialisms, for example between Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology. In both Biology and French the evidence requirements for Unit assessment and coursework will be designed to allow for extensive personalisation and choice in order to reflect local circumstances. Flexibility and choice should operate at two levels. Firstly, at institutional level, offering schools and colleges the opportunity to draw upon contexts suitable to their circumstances and secondly, at individual level, offering personalisation and choice for learners. Course specifications will be designed to draw upon a wide range of biological and French language contexts that are relevant, challenging and interesting and are at an appropriate standard of understanding and intellectual rigour for their level. They will also ensure progressive development and understanding of science and language concepts, building on experiences and outcomes.

The new qualifications will align with and support 3 to 18 assessment policy and guidance, ensuring that assessment serves learning and that assessment is proportionate, fit for purpose and appropriate for Unit and Course assessment purposes.

## 5 Progression in the senior phase

Flexibility and contextualisation are key to progression, personalisation and choice in the senior phase. As the *Scottish Government’s Technical Annex for the next generation of National Qualifications* explains:

‘The qualifications will offer increased flexibility, provide more time for learning, more focus on skills and applying learning, and more scope for personalisation.’

and

‘The qualifications are designed to meet the needs of all learners in progressing from their prior levels of achievement in their broad general education, through the qualifications framework to other learning and employment.’

In S3, learners will have made some choices about which qualifications they want to take, in which subjects and at which levels. It will be for local arrangements to determine for each learner what degree of personalisation and choice is available in relation to course length, programme design, and learning and teaching approaches. Where appropriate and practical, learners may be engaged in courses of varying lengths but typically one or two year programmes of study. Learners will be engaged in programmes of learning which are practical, appropriate and meet their needs.

At the end of S4, they may be in school, college, with training providers, in the workplace, engaging in programmes offered by community and youth groups — or in programmes offered in collaboration, such as those offered through school–college, school–employer, or school–university partnerships. They may be in full- or part-time programmes. They may be studying by a combination of taught classes and distance learning. As they move through S5 and S6, they may experience an increasing range of delivery and partnership arrangements, with more and more emphasis on learner autonomy in taking responsibility for their own learning. As the discussion paper on the Senior Phase describes:

‘The commitment to deliver the entitlements described in Curriculum for Excellence for all young people means the development of different mechanisms involving a range of providers. In the Senior Phase it is likely to become more common for young people to learn through a range of providers, including other schools, colleges, universities, youth work and other less formal learning settings and in a range of mediums through both direct contact and the use of ICT. This makes it particularly important to ensure that all young people can experience a coherent curriculum in the full range of settings.’

## 6 Progression in science and languages, S1–S6

In S1–S3, learners will experience programmes of learning designed around the experiences and outcomes. These may be put together in different ways to suit local and individual circumstances. Programmes will allow learners to distinguish between learning within the broad curriculum area as well as appreciating the complex connections between subjects, and between science and language subjects and other areas of learning. In science for example they will be thinking about ways in which science and subjects within science relate to and are informed by other subjects like mathematics and the technologies. This is encouraged through the outcomes and experiences, such as the following third level outcome:

‘I have explored the role of technology in monitoring health and improving the quality of life.’ (SCN 3–12b)

In the languages area, learners should be encouraged to examine roots and linguistic links with other known languages and, where appropriate, classical languages, as is evidenced by the text of the introductory statement for experiences and outcomes for both Modern and Classical Languages:

‘Through my learning of a new language: I gain a deeper understanding of my first language and appreciate the richness and interconnected nature of languages.’

Programmes of learning will allow learners to see the importance of links between disciplines, such as science, social studies, languages or business subjects. For example, the science experience and outcome quoted above (SCN 3–12b) encourages consideration of the impact of science and technology on people’s lives. It suggests the possibility of consideration of ethical issues, and while the means of learning and of presenting evidence of learning is not specified, it is easy to imagine that this outcome could be informed by an investigative project, perhaps written up and presented in some way. Other experiences and outcomes suggest rich possibilities for links between sciences and other disciplines, for example:

‘I have collaborated with others to find and present information on how scientists from Scotland and beyond have contributed to innovative research and development.’   
(SCN 3–20a)

‘Through research and discussion, I have contributed to evaluations of media items with regard to scientific content and ethical implications.’   
(SCN 3–20b)

And between languages and other disciplines, for example:

‘I can, using a variety of media including ICT where appropriate plan, prepare and deliver an individual presentation in the language I am learning on topics of personal interest or linked to an aspect of a country where the language I am studying is spoken.’  
(MLAN 4–06a)

There are a number of ways in which schools might design their approach to qualifications ‘making greater use of prior learning’ as proposed by the Cabinet Secretary in her announcement on qualifications. This will best be facilitated by teachers and learners building upon appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding in earlier years of schooling, in order to ensure an even gradient of progression towards qualifications in the senior phase. As well as the qualifications mentioned above, the qualifications which are currently available to learners in S4–S6 include those below:

* a wide range of National Units at SCQF levels 1 to 7
* National Courses and Units at SCQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 — Access 2, Access 3, National 4 and National 5 — for example: Biology, Chemistry and Physics
* Highers and Units at SCQF level 6 — for example: French, Italian and German
* Advanced Highers and Units at SCQF level 7
* the Scottish Baccalaureate in Science, and the Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages which allow learners to combine Courses at Higher and Advanced Higher with an Interdisciplinary Project, which develops the independent learning skills needed for progression to higher education and employment

While the design and content of new and revised qualifications will be refreshed, it is assumed that a broadly similar range of qualification titles will be available.

In addition to new and revised National Courses, learners in Scotland’s colleges or those in employment or training will be accessing vocational programmes leading to employment or further study. Increasingly these programmes — albeit mainly those at NQ level — will also be accessed by school-based learners on a part-time basis as part of a school–college partnership programme. This might include National Qualification Group Awards, such as the National Certificate in Applied Science at SCQF level 5 or 6, or the National Certificate in Pharmaceutical Science at SCQF level 6. It might also include NQ Units, such as the wide variety available in languages.

Learners might also experience Higher National Units at SCQF levels 6, 7 and 8 as part of school–college partnership programmes. Delivery of Higher National Units in this way is becoming an increasing feature of programmes on offer to learners in S4–S6.

Finally, learners who have moved into the workplace may have the opportunity of completing a Modern Apprenticeship (MA), which could include Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) or HN qualifications.

## 7 Case studies — some examples of possible progression routes

The following case studies are offered in order to exemplify how the system might work in practice.

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|  | **Case study 1** |
| **In S1–S3** | Learner A, from Hungary, joins a Glasgow school in S2. He has some initial difficulties with English language skills, but as he has a solid educational background he is able to cope with the language demands of most subjects while receiving EAL support in class. |
| **At the end of S3** | He has made some progress through second and third level curriculum outcomes and is at level 3 in some aspects of Literacy and Numeracy. |
| **In S4** | He completes National Courses at SCQF level 3 in a range of subjects, including Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and ESOL. |
| **At the end of S4** | He leaves school and attends a Glasgow college on a part-time access programme while working in a supermarket. The course includes NQ Units at SCQF level 4 in Science, Mathematics and ESOL. |
| **Further education** | The following year he attends college full-time and completes the National Certificate (NC) at SCQF level 5 in Applied Science, together with National 4 English and Mathematics. As part of the programme he has the opportunity of work experience. |
| **Employment** | In the summer he gains employment with the company he was on work experience with. Through his employer he is able to attend college on a day-release course and achieves the National Certificate at SCQF level 6 in Applied Sciences over two years. |
| **Other achievements** | He has throughout this time been building his portfolio of achievement which includes part-time work and achievements on the football field. These have helped him build his confidence and skills, especially interpersonal skills and skills for employability. |

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|  | **Case study 2** |
| **In S1–S3** | Learner B is making confident and secure progress through curriculum area outcomes and experiences by the end of S2. |
| **In S3** | She continues to make confident and secure progress through all curriculum area outcomes and experiences. Local timetabling arrangements allow her to begin a Skills for Work Course at SCQF level 5 in Energy at a local college. |
| **At the end of S3** | Her S3 profile statement recognises her skills and abilities across the curriculum areas with particular strengths in science. She is working at fourth level in science (and in many other curriculum areas) by the end of S3. She gains Literacy and Numeracy qualifications at SCQF level 4 and two Units from the Skills for Work Course. |
| **In S4** | She also does National 5 Biology, Chemistry and Physics, achieving B, C and C passes respectively at the end of S4. She also completes her Skills for Work Course and achieves a pass in National 4 Geography. |
| **Over S5 and S6** | In S5 she achieves B passes at National 5 in English and Mathematics as well as completing a Unit in Laboratory Safety at SCQF level 5. In S6 she achieves Highers in Biology, Chemistry and Physics with C, D and B passes respectively. |
| **Further education** | She goes to college to do a two-year full-time Higher National Diploma in Applied Biological Sciences (SCQF level 8). |
| **Higher education** | She completes her HND and is able to enter the third year of a bioscience degree. |
| **Other achievements** | Throughout this time she has been building a portfolio of achievement which includes voluntary work and her work as vice-president of the college student union. These have helped her develop enterprise skills and the ability to work well with others. |

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|  | **Case study 3** |
| **Post-school** | Learner C left school at 16 with some Standard Grade General and Foundation qualifications including Biology. Ten years later he is made redundant from his job in a bakery towards the end of the summer. |
| **Community learning and other achievements** | In the autumn he takes some CLD classes in basic and study skills. He begins to build a portfolio of achievement, including his involvement in coaching an under-18 rugby team. This process is as helpful for self-reflection purposes as it is for recording what he has achieved. |
| **Returning to full-time education in college** | In January of the following year, he takes an Access to Education course at a local college. His course includes Literacy and Numeracy qualifications and some introductory Units in science which he chooses from an elective programme. He passes the science Units and achieves Literacy and Numeracy qualifications at SCQF level 4.  That autumn, he continues his full-time studies. His interest in science, something ‘he was good at, at school’ leads him to take a programme of Units at SCQF levels 4 and 5 in Biology and Chemistry, together with English and Mathematics. The college gives him the opportunity of a work experience placement one day a week in a biotechnology company. |
| **Employment** | At the end of his course, he is offered a full-time job with the biotechnology company. His employer gives him an opportunity to take a work-based qualification, the SVQ 3 in Laboratory and Associated Technical Activities. |

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|  | **Case study 4** |
| **In S1–S3** | Learner D makes confident and secure progress across curriculum outcomes and experiences and is building depth, breadth and application at fourth level in languages (and in many other curriculum areas) towards the end of S2. |
| **At the end of S3** | Her S3 statement recognises her skills and abilities across the eight curriculum areas with particular strengths in languages. She achieves Literacy and Numeracy qualifications at SCQF level 5 and a level 5 Unit in French for Work Purposes. |
| **In S4** | She does Highers in French, Italian, History and Mathematics, and a National 5 in Chinese, achieving A passes at the end of S4. |
| **In S5** | She does Advanced Highers in French and Italian and also completes Higher English which she has studied over two years. She achieves A passes in all of her language subjects and a B pass in Higher English. |
| **In S6** | She decides to complete the Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages, doing her Interdisciplinary Project through a work placement with an international company, as well as partnership arrangements with a local college and a university in a nearby city. She also does a ‘crash’ National 5 in Latin. As part of the partnership arrangements, she takes a triple-credit Higher National Unit at SCQF level 7 in Advanced Operational Spanish at the college. She achieves A passes in the Higher and in her Interdisciplinary Project, and a pass in the HN Unit. She achieves the Baccalaureate with Distinction. |
| **Higher education** | At the end of S6, she progresses to a degree in International Relations. |
| **Other achievements** | Throughout this time she has been developing skills for learning, life and work, and building a portfolio of achievement which includes Duke of Edinburgh Awards and musical achievements. |

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|  | **Case study 5** |
| **Post-school** | Learner E left her country of origin, Albania, where she had left school at 14. |
| **Community learning and other achievements** | She enrols in local Community Learning and Development (CLD) SCQF level 3 ESOL and basic computing classes. She begins to build a portfolio of achievement, including her involvement in a women’s community group supporting migrant mothers. |
| **Returning to full-time education in college** | Two years later, she enrols in the local college for a National 4 in ESOL and a NQGA: National Certificate at SCQF level 5 in Hairdressing. Her programme includes Literacy and Numeracy qualifications. She achieves Literacy and Numeracy qualifications at SCQF level 4.  That autumn, she continues her full-time studies. Her interest in languages leads her to take German for Work Purposes, together with the ESOL Course, at SCQF level 4. The college gives her the opportunity of a work experience placement one day a week in a hairdressing salon, and she completes all of the qualifications she has been taking. |
| **Employment** | At the end of her programme, she is offered a full-time job with the salon. After a year of employment her employer gives her an opportunity to take a work-based qualification, the SVQ 3 in Hairdressing. |